

# GOOD WORK NEWS

The Working Centre, 58 Queen St. S. Kitchener, ON N2G 1V6

Issue 164

March 2026

Subscription: A Donation Towards our Work

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## The 37th Mayors' Dinner

Join us for an evening of celebration and recognition of the work of building social connections and community

### Places of Inclusion – The Heart of Belonging

This year's Mayors' Dinner theme is Places of Inclusion – The Heart of Belonging. The evening will highlight examples of placemaking - ideas that rejuvenate community life. The Heart of Belonging will be celebrated through projects that build connections between people and community. (See article on this page)

Saturday, April 11th, 2026

Marshall Hall | Bingemans

Tickets are now available for purchase. Join us for this celebration and invite your friends to come along. All proceeds support The Working Centre.

Tickets can be purchased online at:  
[www.theworkingcentre.org/md](http://www.theworkingcentre.org/md)

For more information, call 519.743.1151 x109 or email: [mayorsdinner@theworkingcentre.org](mailto:mayorsdinner@theworkingcentre.org)

## Places of Inclusion

By Stephanie Mancini

Gathering in public spaces helps to build community and awareness of one another – in our similarities and our differences. The Mayors' Dinner, now in its 37th year, is a public gathering that brings 900 people together annually, to celebrate commitment to the common good, to gather, and to support The Working Centre. At this year's Mayors' Dinner, we will highlight community endeavours that foster the habit of supporting public places.

Brian MacLaren, writing in the Centre for Action and Contemplation's Daily Meditation – Good News for a Fractured World – focused one session on Falling Apart, Coming Together:

"Our world is deeply fractured. We see the symptoms all around us. We see it in politics. We see it in social media. We see it in our families and denominations. Those fractures couldn't come at a worse time.[...] We need to come together to explore better ways of living with ourselves, with one another, and with this sacred beautiful earth."

When we gather in common, we break down isolation – isolation that can come from privilege,

*Being together in public spaces helps us to see and recognize kinship with others. This world view changes our way of seeing and our way of being together. It helps us to foster belonging.*

from loneliness, from a lack of resources, from fear, from all the things that divide us. By becoming active in public spaces, we reclaim connection, we break down the barriers that divide us. Learning how to recognize and be a part of common spaces and activities can be enlivening and life giving.

Fr. Greg Boyle says – "We belong to each other." Being together in public spaces helps us to see and recognize kinship with others. This world view changes our way of seeing and our way of being together. It helps us to foster belonging.

This year's WRCF Vital Signs report invites us to explore ways "we can renew, reinvest in, and reimagine our shared spaces to meet today's challenges". We see so many changes happening in our community and in our world. How do we challenge ourselves to stay open

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## Overnight Warming Centre at St. John's Kitchen

By Stephanie Mancini

It has been an exceptionally cold and snowy winter, and the impact on this for many we support is significant. Those living in encampments, outside, or who are precariously housed, face significant risks to their health and wellbeing. St. John's Kitchen has been a daytime refuge for people during this winter - a place to get respite from the cold, to enjoy a warm meal and coffee, and to connect with many

community services in one central location. We are able to keep eyes and ears on people who are most vulnerable and help to buffer the effects of the harsh winter as we focus on wellness, connection, and belonging.

As we closed our doors each day, we could feel how tragic it was, knowing people might find a place to be for the evening, but they would be outside in the coldest overnight time. The dissonance

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## Forty-Second Year

Issue 164

March 2026

# Good Work News

Good Work News was first produced in September 1984. It is published four times a year by The Working Centre and St. John's Kitchen as a forum of opinions and ideas on work and unemployment. Four issues of Good Work News constitutes our annual report. There is a circulation of 13,000 copies. Subscription: a donation towards our work.

**Editors:** Joe Mancini, Stephanie Mancini

**Contributors:** Thomas Fraser, Douglas MacLellan, JP Smola, Fr. Toby Collins CR, Amaryah DeGroot, Dianne Green, Tanya Fillier, Roger Gilbert, Cassandra Polyzou, Ayman Eldesouky, Matthew McCarthy, Christina Mancini

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## New Tax Program Support

By Amaryah DeGroot

The Working Centre is pleased to be one of 97 organizations across Canada supported through **Resilient Futures** in partnership with Prosper Canada, designed to make sure people with low and modest incomes can get access to free, high-quality financial help services in the communities where they live. The project is funded by the Government of Canada through the Social Development Partnerships Program – Children and Families.

While continuing to support our existing financial problem-solving supports, we are also now a Financial Empowerment Hub, supporting a shared learning environment with 10-15 local grassroots organizations. We held our first collaborative meeting with local partners and shared awareness about existing services and ways to build a local community of practice. We are starting with building knowledge around Income Tax completion.

At The Working Centre we start our Income Tax clinic in early March, where we expect to see around 4,000 people in 2 months. Volunteers gather to provide support in a variety of languages, and certified CVITP volunteers also gather in the background to officially file return after return. Last year our income tax clinics served 3,887 individuals and families file their taxes to secure \$15,957,090 in benefits.



### Free Income Tax Clinic Begins March 2nd

The Working Centre is once again offering Income Tax Clinic support for people living on a limited income. It will begin on **March 2nd, 2026**.

We will continue to offer tax clinic support as a walk-in and drop-off clinic this year. We are located at 58 Queen Street South, Kitchener, open from 9am to 4pm Monday to Friday except for holidays.

Volunteers registered with the Community Volunteer Income Tax Program will help to complete income tax returns.

Intake forms and information about eligibility requirements are available online at [www.theworkingcentre.org](http://www.theworkingcentre.org). If you have questions, please contact us at [taxclinic@theworkingcentre.org](mailto:taxclinic@theworkingcentre.org).



## Garbage Fairies KW Raise \$13,000

Since 2021, Dianne, Barb, and Steph have joined together to raise over \$27,000 through litter picking, perpetual bottle/can drive, scrap metal collection, and giving used items a second life. Their initiative is growing, and in 2025, they raised \$13,000 for The Working Centre.

### How The Garbage Fairies Started

This initiative started when COVID hit in March 2020. Dianne began litter picking at Bechtel Park and then branched out to other areas. In 2021, she raised \$180 just from found alcohol containers. Since then, she met Barb, another avid litter picker, and Steph, who's found a penchant for salvaging scrap metal. Together this team has raised \$27,330 for local charities. In 2023, we settled on The Working Centre for our annual donation. The work they do for our community is nothing short of amazing and we're honoured to continue doing what we can to support their efforts.



### Litter Picking with a Purpose

When we're litter picking in our parks and neighbourhoods, we find more than just trash. Refundable bottles and cans, scrap metal, and even reusable items are sorted and turned into funds. We do regular clean ups throughout Kitchener and Waterloo and welcome suggestions from the community on where we should head next!

### Perpetual Bottle & Can Drive

This is one of our easiest ways for supporters to help — all year long. Community members save and donate their empty bottles and cans, and we pick them up and return them for deposit refunds.

### Scrap for Cash

We collect scrap metal and take it to local recycling depots in exchange for cash. Collecting these items diverts them from the landfill.

In 2025, we raised \$3257.05 just from scrap for cash! What we collect:

- metal including copper,

*In the photo above, The Garbage Fairies - Dianne Green, Steph Den Haan, Barb Wiens, present the \$13,000 cheque from their recycling efforts. Accepting the cheque from St. John's Kitchen from left to right - Joe Mancini, Holly Schuknecht, Tracy McPherson, and Liam Epps.*

- aluminum, brass, steel
- appliances including stoves, fridges, freezers, microwaves, anything with an electrical cord
- electronics including tv's, printers, computer towers and screens
- old cameras
- tire rims
- pop cans (did you know it only takes about 30 cans to get a pound of aluminum?) Save those cans and let us know when you have a bag for pick up!

### How You Can Help

We're excited to build on this momentum in 2026 — and we'd love to have you join us. Here's how you can help:

- Save your bottles and cans and let us know when you're ready for a pickup;
- Become a neighbourhood collector by gathering refundable alcohol containers from friends, family, or neighbours;
- Donate or gather scrap metal or old appliances instead of sending them to the landfill
- Keep an eye out for reusable items that could be sold or repurposed;
- Suggest clean-up locations or join us for a litter pick;
- Donate small storage space in Bridgeport/Kiwanis area. When we have a lot of scrap to break down, or items waiting to be sold, we run out of space. Ideally this could also be a convenient hub for items to be dropped off.

Whether you have time, items to donate, or just the willingness to spread the word, every small action adds up.

Contact us at [garbagefairieskw@gmail.com](mailto:garbagefairieskw@gmail.com) or DM us on Facebook – **Garbage Fairies KW**.

# St. John's Kitchen and A Community of Supports

By Roger Gilbert

If you stand by the doors of the new St. John's Kitchen, you see the constant flow as people come in and out. Some go immediately left to access showers, washrooms, laundry; others turn right to enter the dining room and select a table either alone or with friends. Each day some 350-400 people visit the space.

As we all know, this winter has been exceptionally cold. The impact for many we support is significant. Those living in encampments and outside or who are precariously housed, have significant risks to their health and well being. St. John's Kitchen has been a refuge for community during this winter. A place to get respite from the cold, a warm meal and coffee, a place to connect and feel part of community, and to be able to access so many other critical services in one centralized location. We are able to keep eyes and ears on the vulnerable members of our community and buffer the effects of this harsh winter to focus on wellness, connection, and belonging.

We have all been grateful for how smooth the transition to the new space has been. We have heard how this beautiful new space has been built with so much intention, based on our experiences over many years of serving a daily meal. It has felt

very quickly like the community's space at the heart of St. John's Kitchen.

Here is a further list of all the connections that go on in the St. John's Kitchen regularly:

- Working Centre teams and community partners help to embed resources in the space, making them equitable and accessible. For example, 100 - 120 people utilize the market table, the showers are used up to 20 times a day, while 10 people access the laundry. The public washrooms are busy all day long.
- Our Street Outreach teams meet to problem-solve a wide range of life issues and help people to have all their paper-work ready to qualify for housing.
- The Specialized Outreach team meets with people to help with overall personal and emotional stability, wound care, mental health supports, and system navigation.
- Our Money Matters team is present to support financial problem-solving, income tax preparation, and registration for benefits like the Canadian Dental Benefit.
- The Working Centre hosts a Hart Hub employment role that visits a variety of community agencies, including St. John's Kitchen.
- There are three Community



Photo courtesy of Matthew McCarthy/Waterloo Region Record

In mid January as the Overnight Warming Centre opened, the Waterloo Record was at St. John's Kitchen taking some photos for an article. Matthew McCarthy generously took a photo of the SJK crew in the kitchen with volunteers serving meals in the background. In the photo from right to left: Asnake Dabala (former Working Centre board member and volunteer), Allyssa Livermore, Joe Mancini, Ryan Ayton, Rachel Hughes, Kajaw Jalal, and AJ Mbohi.

Health Caring (CHC) medical clinics scheduled weekly.

- CMHA is present with their Here24/7 team to support community referrals.
- The CHC has recently resumed their ID clinic one day a week.
- There is an upcoming pet clinic happening in partnership with Sanguen.
- Starling housing team regularly meets with people on site.

Our SJK team supports this access to services, to food, snacks, water, as well as appropriate clothing, socks, gloves, and footwear. The pace is constant and engaging as we listen actively to each person's needs, helping to respond to the basic needs of today.

Food and drinks are available

throughout the day ensuring everyone has enough to eat. People can eat in the dining room with plates and mugs, or they can choose take-away containers.

Flow is probably the best word for the space. Watching the flow of people, of the generous volunteers helping to make services run smoothly, of our team responding to a conflict or helping problem-solve a particular need or simply offering a daily greeting of welcome. We are so pleased with this new home for St. John's Kitchen. It was built to suit the flow, built with so much intention. It has felt very quickly like a true community space, as people participate actively, settle into the space with respect, and join the wide community that makes St. John's Kitchen possible.

## Overnight Warming Centre

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of seeing people become angrier and more unwell with each day, eventually helped us decide to open the Overnight Warming Centre. Ethically we knew we had to act.

When we made the leap to open the Overnight Warming centre, we had a good sense of trust that there were other community members who felt the same. Little did we know the tremendous response that we would get as donations large and small started to pour in. Not only have we met the goal we set, we've exceeded it. We have witnessed our community taking action to make something vitally important happen. We felt such gratitude for the community trust that ensured we had the funds to pay for the Warming Centre costs.

The Overnight Warming Centre stands as witness to the importance of this decision to act together. We started with about 60 to 65 people, rapidly grew to about 85 to 90, and now we are seeing between 110 and 120 people per night. Some people come in and go right to sleep, eager to replenish the sleep that they missed while they were living outside. Others sleep as they are able. We offer indoor space, a

safe place where you are known, and a sense of welcome and respite. Those whose mental state means they don't easily fit in other congregate settings have mostly been able to come into this space.

People's tolerance and patience have been a meaningful part of this Warming Centre. In the face of a few angry outbreaks or psychotic moments a night, people help to maintain a sense of calm. In the mornings, people are helping to do the sweeping and cleanup to get the space ready for the daytime. We ask people to leave by 7:30am and they are welcome back two hours later for the regular SJK day. This helps us to maintain cleanliness in the space and the chance to move forward into the day without carrying the happenings of the night, and vice versa. It gives people a chance to reintroduce themselves as they start a new day.

St. John's Kitchen has been a place of respite through the challenges of frigidly cold weather, homelessness, and a deeply addictive drug crisis. We watch the difference it makes when people have a safe option, when they can sleep more, and when they do not feel the isolation of long cold winter nights outside.



### Community Support for the Overnight Warming Centre

In the midst of a string of frigid cold nights, The Working Centre pulled together its resources to open the new St. John's Kitchen as an Overnight Warming Centre. We invited the community to help support the costs.

It was heart warming when so many people made generous donations to ensure the Overnight Warming Centre was possible. A friend of The Working Centre made a generous anonymous donation, matching \$100,000 worth of contributions. Many donors were happy to contribute and see their donation was matched.

The Congregation of the Resurrection, also long-time supporters, made a substantial contribution of \$50,000. In the photo above Fr. Tim Uniac CR, Provincial Superior, Fr. Toby Collins CR, Pastor of St. Mary's Catholic Church and Fr. Raphael Ma, CR Associate Pastor at St. Mary's Catholic Church visited the Overnight Warming Centre to present the cheque to Joe Mancini along with workers and patrons.

By acting together we have been able to support people through these cold winter nights.

Your support has boosted our spirits during the hardest part of the winter months. With the generous help we've received we have been able to act practically into a situation that was hard to witness.

We have learned the importance of extending the use of St. John's Kitchen as a warming centre. We express our deep gratitude for supporting this act of caring and hospitality.

# Places of Inclusion

continued from page 1

to this change and to strengthen our core values of compassion and inclusion? Participating in public spaces is one way to do this.

The Mayors' Dinner will explore three different kinds of public spaces that have worked to support the common good. First, we will hear how Michele and Rob Way have built common ground through an annual event aligned with a national effort – Hockey Helps the Homeless. Secondly, we will hear Oluseun Olayinka as she reflects on the beauty and possibilities of welcoming people into the common place and movement of Adventure4Change. Finally we will learn more about The Working Centre's community enterprise projects as unique places of purpose and gathering.

## Rob and Michele Way

Rob and Michele Way live, work, and have raised their family in Waterloo Region, building deep roots in both the business and nonprofit communities. After meeting as students at Wilfrid



**Rob and Michele Way**

(Photo courtesy of Julian Gavaghan)

Laurier University, they each pursued professional designations—Rob as a CPA and Michele as a CHRP—and have gone on to lead and grow their companies, Softcare and now Swiftspace. Throughout the years, they have remained committed to strengthening the community they call home.

For decades, Rob and Michele have dedicated significant volunteer time and financial support to organizations serving the Region's most vulnerable. Their contributions have helped advance the missions of The United Way, The Sunshine Foundation, and KidsAbility. They also share a strong belief in the importance of a resilient local health-care system. Together, they have served in leadership roles on Boards and Committees at Legacy St. Mary's and, most recently, at the Waterloo Region Hospitals Network (WRHN), working to improve care for individuals and families facing health challenges.

One cause especially close to their hearts for the past 13 years is Hockey Helps the Homeless (HHTH), a national organization that aligns deeply with their values of engagement, creativity, and

collective action. Rob serves as Chair of the National Board, and both Rob and Michele are actively involved in the organizing committee for the annual Waterloo Region Tournament. This unique event brings together players, business leaders, community members, NHL alumni, and Olympians,



transforming a shared passion for hockey into a powerful force for both education and fundraising.

Funds raised through HHTH support frontline agencies that provide housing, mental health care, employment programs, and essential services for individuals experiencing homelessness. In Waterloo Region, every dollar stays local - fueling grassroots impact through 6 organizations - The Working Centre, oneRoof, House of Friendship, YW Kitchener-Waterloo, Starling Community Services and the Cambridge Shelter. Whether through sport, health care, or community partnerships, Rob and Michele—along with their family—remain steadfast in their commitment to supporting those most vulnerable. Their work reflects a deep belief that when people unite with purpose, compassion, and opportunity, remarkable things can happen. Stronger individuals create stronger communities, and the Ways continue to champion initiatives that empower others to learn, to give, and to thrive.

## Oluseun Olayinka

Oluseun Olayinka is a wife, mother of four amazing children, nonprofit executive, and doctoral scholar committed to strengthening families and communities. She



**Oluseun Olayinka**

serves as Executive Director of Adventure4Change, a registered Canadian charity based in Waterloo, Ontario, and is a PhD student in the Faculty of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University.

Adventure4Change is a vibrant community where skills are built, and connections are made that impact inspired change. Their goal is to prevent poverty and

enable kids, youth, and moms to make meaningful contributions to society. As an organization they are rooted in connection, belonging, and empowerment, growing from a small neighbourhood initiative into a trusted community anchor.

Basadi is their social enterprise project, a sewing program that began as a space to learn practical skills and has evolved into a community of moms who gather each week to share stories, practice English, and celebrate one another's talents.

Youth programs help young people to feel they belong and build confidence in sports, self-image, and tutored learning. Families are supported through settlement and system navigation, mental health supports, and health access. Adventure4Change has an ongoing priority to create safe spaces that inspire hope and nurture anticipation for a brighter future.



Oluseun Olayinka is a dynamic voice for the work of Adventure4Change. She brings over two decades of leadership experience spanning organizational development consulting, community development, and social impact initiatives. She serves on the Board of the Waterloo Region Health Network (WRHN) and Social Ventures Partner Waterloo Region. She is also a member of the Waterloo Region District School Board's Equity Advisory Group, and the Child and Youth Planning Table Steering Committee.

Her research and leadership focus on building sustainable, community-led social service organizations that advance equity and create lasting impact for neighbourhoods and families.

## The Working Centre Community Tools

The Working Centre Community Enterprise Projects create spaces for creative work that serves community and creates places of welcome and inclusion. We will highlight the Queen Street Commons Café, Worth a Second Look, and Recycle Cycles.

Community Tool projects are practical and productive examples of enterprise. We serve the common good through skill building and providing shared access to tools to encourage equitable participation in making and doing together. The Working Centre holds the main infrastructure and volunteers participate actively in the core work of the project. There is a focus on regeneration through re-use, re-purposing, and creating goods and services. Affordability is part of each project – helping to make goods and services available for people living on a limited income. In these



**Recycle Cycles Bike Shop**

spaces we gather, bringing diverse people together, enjoying our work, and building skills.

- **The Queen Street Commons Café** is a gathering place that has been central to community vitality since 2006. Our newly renovated café offers delicious vegetarian food, events, coffee and other special drinks in a bright and homey space.
- **Worth a Second Look Furniture & Housewares** is a used-items retail outlet whose goal is to provide the community with thousands of low-cost furniture and houseware items. We help to keep reusable goods out of landfills and to repurpose used goods.
- **Recycle Cycles Community Bike Shop** puts a focus on promoting cycling by making bicycle purchase, maintenance, and repair accessible and affordable. We offer inexpensive reconditioned bicycles for children and adults. Our shop supports people to repair and maintain their own bike. We have a large supply of used, refurbished, and some new parts.



Civic culture grows when people have abundant opportunities to participate in projects that improve their communities. These are the kinds of places that can strengthen the social fabric. Places where neighbours can gather, celebrate, contribute, and connect with each other. We would all benefit by an increased vision towards creating common spaces that promote this kind of place-making. This year's The Mayors' Dinner will highlight how community projects are essential for community building.



Join us on Saturday April 11th for the 37th Annual Mayors' Dinner to celebrate community builders in Waterloo Region. Tickets are now available for purchase on our website: [www.theworkingcentre.org/md](http://www.theworkingcentre.org/md). All proceeds support The Working Centre and St. John's Kitchen.

# Meditation on Making Home

By Thomas Fraser

As we go about our days, we are each drawn into zones of seeming familiarity. Work, family, routine, the ordinary fabric of everyday life—sometimes so familiar as to be taken entirely for granted. But if we pay close attention, we may be struck by the hidden depths of the everyday. Suddenly, the face of the other ceases to be just another passing shape; instead, I am seized by a living Thou, revealing depths of vulnerability and transcendence. The objects that surround me, the ground on which I stand, cease to be bare surfaces and reveal layered histories of struggle and care, of lives lived and forgotten. And perhaps nowhere is this truer than in the places we call home, the spaces that either hold or refuse us.

Rarely do we reflect on the meaning of such words. But it's worth pausing to ask: what do we mean when we speak of home? At once abstract and concrete, home signifies both a place of dwelling and a state of rootedness or belonging, deriving from the Old English ham ("dwelling place, house, abode") and the ancient root tkei ("to settle, dwell, or be at home").<sup>[1]</sup> When we speak of home, then, we are speaking not merely of a physical space or structure, but of our rootedness in a world of belonging. As the philosopher Simone Weil once put it, "to be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul."<sup>[2]</sup>

But what of those for whom rootedness is denied?

As I write these words, the season's first snowfall is upon us. As temperatures drop below freezing, I am reminded that in 2024, more than 80,000 people in Ontario were unhoused, an increase of 25 percent since 2022 and enough to fill a small city. Of these, more than half were chronically homeless, their lives stretched across months or years without stable shelter.<sup>[3]</sup> In

*As temperatures drop below freezing, I am reminded that in 2024, more than 80,000 people in Ontario were unhoused, an increase of 25 percent since 2022 and enough to fill a small city. Of these, more than half were chronically homeless, their lives stretched across months or years without stable shelter*

Waterloo Region alone, over 2,300 were unhoused, 78 percent of whom were chronically homeless and 41 percent living rough, subject to harsh environmental conditions.<sup>[4]</sup> As this current winter deepens, hundreds across our region face the same reality, including the folks we walk alongside.

These numbers, stark as they are, tell only part of the story. Behind each figure is a life, a Thou, for whom home has become a distant abstraction. For instance, one of the folks we support fled war in his youth, violently dislocated from everything he knew. Decades later, he still bears the scars of displacement, hoping to reunite with his mother before time runs out. His story is one among many. For others, perhaps it started with income that could no longer meet rising rents, a conflict that severed the fragile thread of stability, or a space that was unlivable to begin with. Perhaps it was an unexpected loss or injury, the strain of chronic illness and pain, or the absence of support in difficult times. Addiction, mental health struggles, survival strategies that themselves become traps—these too play their part, often stemming from trauma, adversity, and related stressors. The pathways are as varied as the lives they affect, complex and mutually compounding.<sup>[5]</sup>

Then there is the larger picture. These pathways do not unfold in a vacuum but are nested in broader

webs of complexity: a housing system that treats shelter more as a commodity than a right, an economy structurally geared towards precarity, a drug crisis whose casualties are sons and daughters, and support systems straining to meet existing needs.<sup>[6]</sup> From this perspective, what at first might appear as personal failure or misfortune is recast as a kind of structural abandonment. What this in turn reveals is that we do not inhabit a neutral landscape, but a moral ecology that systematically frustrates the common good.

Recognizing this, we are confronted with the question of how to respond, and the answer begins, quite simply, with not turning away. Instead, we lean into the gap between what is and what could be, embracing what some call "the adjacent possible," the emergent possibilities at the edge of each moment, each state of affairs.<sup>[7]</sup> In our shelter work, this means meeting basic needs while weaving webs of interconnected support: daily deliveries of food and supplies, on-site medical care, mental health and addictions services, housing navigation, employment and financial support, and specialized outreach services. It means life-saving interventions like overdose response, shuttle runs for a range of needs and appointments, help with ID and benefits, and cabin support for folks struggling to maintain their space. It means staff with diverse backgrounds and experience, trained in crisis response and the work of relational presence, building community through peer support and daily connection. It means working alongside neighbors, community partners, and emergency services. Most fundamentally, it means showing up each day with eyes wide open, understanding that change only starts where we are, in the grace and grit of each moment.

The moral ecology we inhabit is not fixed or inevitable. Like all living systems, it can change. Life itself, in its open-ended complexity, continually teaches this truth. Though greater than the sum of its parts, this ecology is made up of

connections in which we, as agents, participate. As Margaret Wheatley has written, "we are, always, poets, exploring possibilities of meaning in a world which is also all the time exploring possibilities."<sup>[8]</sup> Here at TWC, we know this in our bones, and it is faith in the promise of creative possibility that drives everything we do, from daily care to upstream advocacy and systems change. Grounded in humility, guided by shared virtues, and sustained through interdependence, we work to evoke a future in which, to quote Dorothy Day, "the final word is love," a love made real through attention, encounter, and the patient work of making home.<sup>[9]</sup>

Thomas Fraser has recently started at TWC as a housing worker at Erbs Road Shelter.

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- 4) "2024 Point in Time Count Findings." *Region of Waterloo Community Services*, 2024.
- 5) "What Are the Causes of Homelessness?" *Homeless Hub*, 2025. <https://homelesshub.ca/collection/homelessness-101/what-are-the-causes-of-homelessness/>
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- 8) Wheatley, Margaret J and Kellner-Rogers, Myron. "Self." *In A Simpler Way*. Berret-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 1999.
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## Food Bank provides over 758,000 pounds of food in 12 month period

In 2024-2025, The Food Bank of Waterloo region and Cambridge Food Bank distributed more than **9.6 million pounds** of fresh, frozen, and non-perishable food across the Community Food Assistance Network - a seven percent increase compared to the year before. This was the most food ever distributed in a single year.

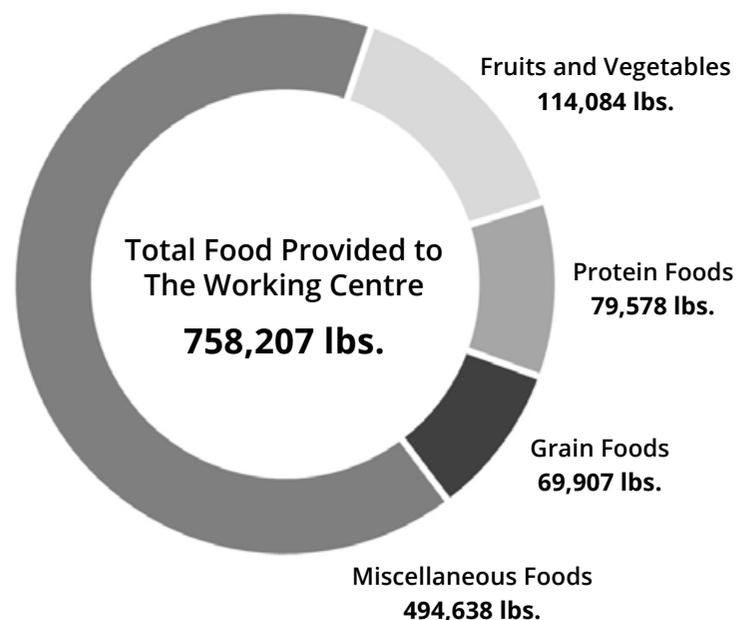
From July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025, The Food Bank of Waterloo Region donated **758,207 pounds** of food to The Working Centre. This amount accounted for nearly 8% of the Food Bank's total donations.

In total, The Working Centre received **\$2,736,229** of value through food and transportation costs. Non food supplies were valued at **\$20,656**.

Additionally, funding received by The Working Centre from the Region of Waterloo through The Food Bank of Waterloo Region totalled **\$59,871** in the same time frame.

Through this generous support, The Working Centre prepared, served, and delivered nearly **200,000 meals** last year.

A huge thank you to the Food Bank of Waterloo Region and its supporters for helping us provide meals to those in need in our community.



# Our First Christmas at the New St. John's Kitchen

The Christmas season is always a time of extraordinary sharing. In the midst of homelessness, the reality of scarcity is also felt, as people search for shelter from the harsh winter weather.

At St John's Kitchen we gather every day with a spirit of sharing and cooperation. Christmas is a time to emphasize how we create an atmosphere of celebration and plenty. A time of asking, how much do you need today? A feeling of abundance reduces competition for resources and helps each person feel a sense of security and belonging.

Our first Christmas dinner at the new St. John's Kitchen was held on December 18th with a feast of traditional home cooked turkey dinner with all the fixings, and pies for dessert. We were accompanied by our Board President Carol Taylor and Acoustic Steel who welcomed people with lively steel drum music. And there was enough for everyone. Our outreach teams carried dinners to encampments and motels and spots where people could be found to share the bounty and to celebrate the season together. In all we served



1,000 Christmas meals. Gift bags of snacks and toiletries were shared.

On Christmas Eve, once again the Swiss Chalet franchise owners throughout KW pitched in together to provide 500 chicken meals that were served throughout the day. We are grateful that this long tradition continued with lots of volunteers helping to serve and clean.

This year, with Christmas Day on a Thursday, our SJK team realized that we couldn't close down for the holidays in the cold weather, so the call went out to those who wanted to help keep the Kitchen open on Christmas and Boxing Days. We had plenty of team members and volunteers who helped to keep the place open. This made Christmas Day even more special, with volunteers working together to keep the spirit of Christmas alive on Christmas Day.

At Erbs Road Shelter the common area was decorated with twinkle lights and Christmas decorations, as the Christmas Day turkey dinner was served for 50 people as



they came together to share the meal. The shuttle helped to get people to places they wanted to visit all through the season.

At Water Street Hospitality House Christmas was celebrated with a family air about the place people make home. Check out the details of their celebration below.

Many thanks to the workers and volunteers at Maurita's Kitchen who ensured that multiple Christmas Dinners were shared by many at these different sites and at different times.

The feeling of plenty extended into the New Year as we settled into

our new home at St. John's Kitchen and knew that this purpose-built space would be perfect to accommodate an Overnight Warming Centre. The feeling of the abundance of space, the strength of our teams who come to work with openness each day, and the generosity of our wider donor community has been a blessing in the face of the hardship and despair that we see around us. We know that when people feel they belong, that they are known, when their very basic needs are met, then we can celebrate special moments together and build a spirit of care for each person.



## Christmas at Water Street Hospitality House

Christmas at Water Street Hospitality House is thoughtfully observed with a careful balance between celebrating the spirit of the season and remaining mindful of the complex emotions and experiences this time of year may evoke for many individuals. Some enjoy the excitement of the day while others want to wish it away.

At Water Street Hospitality House, we tend to enjoy baking, a traditional meal, and generously donated gifts on Christmas Day. A calm settles over the house with some joining in the celebration and others deciding to quietly pass the day reflecting on Christmases past.

Water Street Hospitality House is not new to juggling the varied needs of our residents and Christmas is no different. We work to strike a balance between the excitement of the season and the bittersweet memories that can go along with that for many people.

Christmas time brings twinkle lights, shared baking and reminiscing of years gone by to Water Street Hospitality House.

## Blue Rodeo Keyboardist Mike Boguski Plays Set at St. John's Kitchen



The Blue Rodeo keyboardist, Mike Boguski, came to St. John's Kitchen on Saturday, January 10th to play a one hour set a few hours before his band played at Centre in the Square on their 40th Anniversary Tour. Coincidentally, 40 is the same number of years that St. John's Kitchen has been a

refuge in the downtown. Boguski is grateful for the supports he received from a therapist, an addiction counsellor, and his family that helped him move past his addiction 17 years ago. Boguski told the Record, "If you don't have (support), and you become a victim of addiction, then you're in a precarious place, [...] The only supports you have are the supports that the government's willing to find or that volunteers are willing to fund on a community basis, which is essentially what all of these community shelters and places provide. It's just some kind of reprieve from the horror of having to live unhoused." Boguski admits he doesn't have all the answers for how people get out of the shelter system, nor does he profess to know how to solve the homelessness and addiction epidemic, but what he can do is bring an hour of joy to people.

It is in honour of the supports he received that Boguski reached out to St. John's Kitchen to play a concert for those facing addiction, poverty, and homelessness to not only "recognize them," but to bring music to people who can't necessarily afford a ticket to a concert. (with notes from Bill Doucet, The Waterloo Region Record, Jan 10, 2026).

## Enova Power Donates \$6,000 to The Working Centre



Enova Power kicked off 2026 with a \$6,000 donation to The Working Centre, supporting vital social services for vulnerable residents in Kitchener-Waterloo. The donation was made on behalf of customers who switched to eBilling during the autumn 2025 campaign, which ended on December 31. Enova Power contributed \$5 for each customer who switched.

"Thank you to our customers who switched to eBilling to support The Working Centre," said Enova Power President and CEO, Greig Cameron. "This donation helps the centre's vital work at a time when rising living costs and economic challenges leave more people struggling to make ends meet."

In the photo above Greig Cameron, President and CEO presents the donation cheque to Joe Mancini with Penny Tucker, Director of Customer Care and Billing. Also in the photo Liam Epps from The Working Centre and and Will Stratford, Director, Corporate Services.

# A Regenerative Economy

By Joe Mancini

Dutch historian Rutger Bregman's 2025 Reith Lecture is optimistically titled "A Moral Revolution". His main theme is a call for a moral revolution, the kind of revolution that can only be sparked by small committed groups working to change the way people think and act on the serious issues that surround them.

While we live in the midst of tremendous wealth, it is undoubtable that growing inequality is a root issue. At the same time we live in societies where waste piles up, soils are degraded, the chemical balance of the atmosphere is altered, while fossil fuel use is still debated. The inequality of a housing crisis that is leaving people homeless on every continent is unconscionable.

Bregman fears cynicism and apathy. He worries that, "the old sources of guidance – faith, community, tradition are fading away. Yet nothing equally powerful has taken their place. We are a culture adrift, searching for meaning, but finding distraction."

A culture adrift may also portend new ways of thinking that are struggling to be born. This is the exact right time to find the means of coming together to address environmental and social crises. More than ever, through the gifts of science and faith, this is a time to reflect and act on the emergent and self-organizing properties of complex living systems. Faith, community, and tradition can come back together in new shapes and forms that help society strive cooperatively towards the common good.

The books highlighted in this issue have Integral Ecology as their central organizing thesis, understood as the living systems that constantly combine, recirculate, and recreate. This is not the clockwork universe of scarcity. It is rather a new world where we can rethink how combining, recirculating, and recreating can evolve a new economy of abundance. We have the resources, we have the creativity, and we know how relationships and interconnections can help us envision such an economy. Robin Wall Kimmerer helps us understand what this means when she teaches us that, "wealth comes from reciprocity and the quality of your relationships, not from the illusion of self-sufficiency".

The Working Centre has been

developing its own practices of the Living Systems model. We see this as an emergent process that respects the intrinsic value and the interconnectedness of all living beings. How does such thinking effect the life of an organization? The books highlighted have been helpful guides to our process. Living Systems thinking is a discipline of hope that we are happy to share. In that spirit, we would like to share two of the practices that we are integrating into our work. All six practices can be found at: [www.theworkingcentre.org/about-us/practices/](http://www.theworkingcentre.org/about-us/practices/)

## Follow Regenerative Practices

Regeneration suggests a life-giving process that builds and nourishes the natural life around us. It accepts what is, adding nourishment and new energy to foster a constant spiral of ever strengthening connections. Like nurturing the soil, we first work to minimize soil disruption, to add in nutrition on a constant basis, protect the soil throughout the year, nurture all the insects, mycelium, and worms that help the soil regenerate itself. This same kind of thinking is integral to building community. Like building soil, we help communities form, we support the process, we bring in new ideas and ways of doing things, and we do that in a way that builds new life and energy. When well-tended, each project reflects this regenerative energy.

## Practice Intraconnected Wholeness

We are all one. Often, the message of society and the message we carry in our heads is that we are solo and isolated individuals. But this view of our lives is lonely, minimal, and highly individualistic. Intraconnection means that our whole self is 'fundamental to the social systems and the natural world in which we live'. Our participation in the community mirrors how we think about ourselves. If we see ourselves as intraconnected, it takes us to a wider wholeness. Wholeness is not about sameness but about looking beyond diversity to recognize kinship with all living beings. It is from this wider 'sense of broader belonging' that we can turn to embracing the greater good.

It is through reflecting on our experiences and integrating social analysis and reflection that greater action towards living systems practices will continue to emerge.

## BOOKS FOR SUSTAINABLE LIVING

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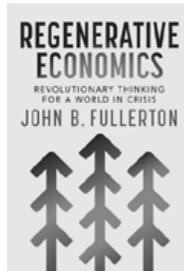
### Leading from the Roots: Nature-Inspired Leadership Lessons for Today's World

Dr. Kathleen E. Allen

Kathleen Allen helps shift assumptions, practices, structures, and processes of organizations to become more resilient and nourishing for all, while addressing and challenging workplace dysfunction and drama. Can we design organizations in a way that creates a space where employees, the organization, and the larger community all thrive? In a time of volatile and complex uncertainty, it is time to learn the lessons of nature's interdependent, dynamic, and living systems. Kathleen

Allen uses the ecology of nature as a model, mentor, and muse to rethink how leadership is practiced today, helping organizations see a new way of leading and designing workplace structure.

204 pages | \$20.00 softcover



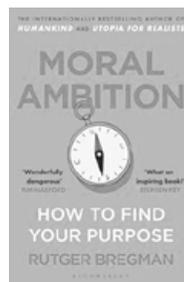
### Regenerative Economics: Revolutionary Thinking for a World in Crisis

John B. Fullerton

Regenerative Economics is based on the deceptively simple idea that an economic system should emulate the process and patterns that define all life, enabling it to adapt and evolve to higher levels of complexity. This science-based next evolution of economics explains the root cause of the polycrisis—the compounding impacts of climate change, ecosystem and biodiversity loss, planetary systems breakdown, and increasing social and economic inequity—and promises a hopeful

pathway forward at this pivotal moment. Rather than reacting to crisis after crisis, the purpose of a regenerative economy is to create the conditions that nurture and sustain health and all life.

296 pages | \$29.99 softcover



### Moral Ambition: How to Find Your Purpose

Rutger Bregman

Every day we're bombarded with methods, that promise us wellness and prosperity. The average full-time worker will spend 80,000 hours at their job: are you making the most of them? Do you truly believe in what you do, day in, day out? What if you want to do something more with your limited time on the planet? Rutger Bregman shows us that with moral ambition - the will to make the world a wildly better place - we can be both idealistic and successful, and change the world along the way. Uncovering the qualities that made the great change-makers of history so effective, he shows how we too can lend our talents to

the biggest challenges of our time, from climate change to inequality to the next pandemic. With moral ambition, we can do more than be on the right side of history: we can make history itself.

277 pages | \$30.00 hardcover



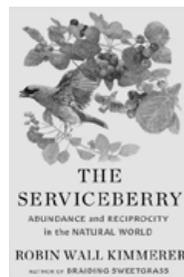
### Combining

Nora Bateson

In 'Combining', Nora Bateson invites us into an ecology of communication where nothing stands alone, and every action sets off a chain of incalculable consequences. She challenges conventional fixes for our problems, highlighting the need to tackle issues at multiple levels, understand interdependence, and embrace ambiguity. Insisting on our collective responsibility to confront the looming threats to humanity's survival, she advocates change through interconnectedness and challenges us to rethink our perspectives

on relationships, community, and the very essence of being human. A blend of intellectual inquiry, essays, emotional engagement, storytelling, poetry, and graphic art, 'Combining' is an invitation to nurture genuine connections and navigate a world brimming with "Warm Data" – the interrelationships that integrate elements of every complex system.

396 pages | \$48.00 hardcover



### The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World

Robin Wall Kimmerer (Author), John Burgoyne (Illustrator)

As Indigenous scientist Robin Wall Kimmerer harvests Serviceberries alongside the birds, she considers the ethic of reciprocity that lies at the heart of the gift economy. How, she asks, can we learn from Indigenous wisdom and the plant world to reimagine what we value most? Our economy is rooted in scarcity, competition, and the hoarding of resources, and we have surrendered our values to a system that actively harms what we love. Meanwhile, the Serviceberry's relationship with the natural world is an embodiment of reciprocity, interconnectedness, and gratitude. The tree distributes its wealth—its abundance of sweet, juicy berries—to meet the needs of its natural community. And this distribution ensures its own survival. As Kimmerer explains, "Serviceberries show us another model, one based upon reciprocity, where wealth comes from the quality of your relationships, not from the illusion of self-sufficiency."

128 pages | \$20.00 hardcover



## WLU Students Tour The Working Centre

On a wintery day in January, we toured students from Wilfrid Laurier University's Global Citizenship Studies through our downtown projects. We shared stories from our lives and those we walk with, the virtues that inform our work, and the many contributions of our teams and volunteers. The students were impacted by the radical hospitality and relational approach they saw in our spaces. They left inspired and hopeful. It was a memorable and meaningful day, between the extreme cold and the keen interest of the students, the work of Wing Yin Li, their incredible professor, and Rebekah Rempel's coordination and participation throughout the day – it all went so well!

# Bringing People Together at Our Community Tools Projects



## Being the Peace

On Saturday December 13th we co-hosted a beautiful evening of poetry readings, and music at the Fresh Ground Cafe. The event was inspired and co-hosted by Ehaab Abdou, with support from Greg Kennedy, and featured a diversity of performers sharing from a diversity of sacred wisdom traditions and philosophies. Carol B. Duncan is a scholar and creative writer and she read an excerpt from her moving short story "Estelle." Abdul Issa played two mesmerizing songs on the Oud.

We hope to welcome more events like this at Fresh Ground Cafe. The next one is scheduled for Saturday March 28th 6pm-8pm, save the date!



Photo courtesy of Taginder Clair, @clair.visuals

## Sunday Grind

On Sunday January 11th, we were delighted to serve coffee and desserts to a large crowd at a session of the Downtown Kitchener BIA's Sunday Grind series. Fresh Ground Cafe was full of great tunes from DJ Yazy and folks were not shy to get up and dance on a Sunday morning. Thank you to everyone who came out!



## WASL Volunteer Christmas Party

Worth A Second Look operates through the work and effort of volunteers. In December WASL volunteers gathered for an annual appreciation lunch to share Christmas and community spirit.

Visit our website to learn more about our Community Tools Projects: [www.theworkingcentre.org](http://www.theworkingcentre.org)

# Thank You for Your Generous Support!

We want to thank all the volunteers, donors, and community partners who have supported The Working Centre community in our efforts to produce and distribute over 700 meals each day, provide shelter to 150 people a night, build housing, support job searching, and develop our access to tools projects. We are deeply grateful, your support makes our vibrant work possible.



## Queen Street Commons is Open!

While the Queen Street Commons was closed during the pandemic, The Working Centre focused its efforts on shelter, housing and construction projects. For the last two years we have valiantly followed renovations related to structural, fire rating and fire code for large gathering spaces.

We are now open! Come join us and celebrate the long awaited opening of the Queen Street Commons at 43 Queen St. South in Kitchener. Visit our website and check social media for updates! We look forward to seeing you!



## worth a second look furniture & housewares

Located steps from the Kitchener Market at 256 King St. East & 37 Market Lane

Worth A Second Look thrift shop provides the community with low-cost used furniture and assorted housewares items while keeping reusable goods out of landfills.

### Thousands of affordable items are available!

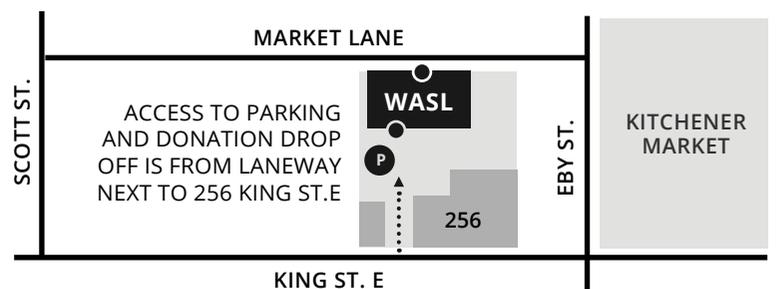
- Furniture | Small Appliances | Housewares | Linens | Electronics | Tools | Mattresses | Jewelry | Books | Toys & Games | Movies & Music | And more!

Donations are welcome! If you would like to donate items, please contact us or drop off items at the donation door of the King St. East entrance during open hours.

### Pick-up and Delivery

For larger donation items, we offer free pick up service for locations in KW. We also offer delivery service for purchased items at a small cost to locations within Waterloo Region.

Thank you to Scherer Chevrolet for donating a new truck for WASL to use for pick-ups and deliveries.



Tues - Fri: 9am - 5pm | Saturdays: 9am - 3pm  
519.569.7566 | [wasl@theworkingcentre.org](mailto:wasl@theworkingcentre.org)